

SECTION 2: LISTENING & OBSERVING

This section aims to help you do three things:


- * listen to the leadings of the spirit and the concerns, values and experiences of yourself and others
- * observe and learn about the world and explore why it is we need to become a low-carbon, sustainable community
- * observe what you are already doing as a meeting to become a low-carbon, sustainable community

2. LISTENING & OBSERVING


Listening

Quaker and non-Quaker groups engaging with sustainability have found that change stems from much more than increased knowledge or understanding of facts (important though these are). Our desire and ability to change is influenced by our values, past experiences, concerns and hopes for the future, and by those around us.

We have found that it is important to give space to explore these with others.

 Exercise 1 (Sowing the seeds of action, page 67) offers one way in which you could explore your values.

Finding our way forward also involves careful listening to the leading of the spirit in worship.

 Exercises 3 and 4 (page 70) are activities suitable for an all-age meeting for worship or special event.

While these are not aimed specifically at this age group, they are activities that children and young people can certainly be a full part of.



Children at YMG.

Photo: ©Mike Pinches 2011



Learning

We have found that a lot of Friends feel insecure in their knowledge and welcome the opportunity to learn and to discuss sustainability. It is a complex and emotional subject that forces us to grapple with science and economics as well our values and beliefs. We also recognise that we don't all agree on the problem or the way we should respond.

There are lots of ways to deepen understanding and discussion.

Film screenings

Film screenings are an easy and effective way to raise awareness and engage people.

 For some suggestions see pages 84–85.

Hosting a speaker

You could invite someone from your meeting or local community who works on sustainability to speak about the issue and what they do.

Members of Living Witness and Quaker Peace & Social Witness are also available to speak. For contact details see the front of the toolkit.

“Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come? Do you approach new ideas with discernment?”

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The Transition movement (see page 58 for further information) suggests starting a film screening or talk by inviting people to turn to their neighbour and tell them who they are and why they are here. They recommend doing this even if you know each other already, because you might not know why people are engaged in the issue.


After the film or talk invite people to do the same thing but with the person on the other side, this time to talk about their thoughts on the film. In their experience people enjoy this and it's a good way to start building connections. At a Quaker event you may also want to end with a short period of quiet reflection or worship sharing.


 See page 77 for some guidance on worship sharing.

The 'Living sustainably' issue of *Journeys in the Spirit*, Youth Work edition – Issue 12, February 2011 (see Further resources, page 82) suggests some questions to think about when watching two of the recommended films: *The Age of Stupid* and *WALL-E*.

Organising a workshop or study group

You could organise a one-off or series of workshops for your meeting, or an ongoing study group.

 For ideas on good resources to use, including those for all-age and children's activities, see study pack and group work on page 82.

 You could also arrange for Woodbrooke-on-the-Road to run a session at your meeting or for a Living Witness Resource Person to visit. See page 82 for details.

Reading and discussing

There are many briefings and books available to read and to base discussions around. You could also start a library in the meeting house containing relevant books and resources. Friends may enjoy reading up on an issue and then exploring how local activity could respond to that. You could open this up to the public too.

 See the Further resources section (page 78) for ideas.

Attending conferences and events

Quaker Peace & Social Witness and Living Witness, as well as Woodbrooke, the Quaker Council for European Affairs and the Quaker Community at Bamford, run conferences and events on sustainability. Consider nominating or supporting a Friend to attend and then holding a discussion group based on their report of the event.

“Bring people with you, don't make them feel guilty. Inform and engage them in the debate. Encourage others to move at their own pace but move. Always keep spiritual issues at the heart of what we say and do.”

Virginia Donovan, Wimbledon Quaker Meeting



Reading the Swarthmore Lecture book, 'Costing not less than everything'.

Photo: ©Mike Pinches 2011

Sustainability story

'We agreed that our first challenge was to educate ourselves'

The Meeting started to take action in earnest towards promoting sustainable living in July 2009. This was prompted specifically by a visit of one of our members to a conference held in Brussels in 2008 organised by the Quaker Council for European Affairs combined with material from the Living Witness Project and the excellent QPSW study booklet *Responding to Climate Change* – and, of course, the feeling that we really should be doing something as a Meeting and not just individually.

So, what did we do? Well, we began by organising a meeting to decide how to proceed. At the meeting we agreed that our first challenge was to educate ourselves – the better, eventually, to enthuse others! We achieved this in various ways; the two most successful being a) to watch and subsequently discuss various documentaries about climate change, including *An Inconvenient Truth*, David Attenborough's *The Truth about Climate Change*, Greenpeace's *A Convenient Solution* and finally *The Age of Stupid*; and b) to invite Living Witness Project to provide a one-day workshop.

Simultaneously, we managed to get an agreement with a free local magazine, *The Bideford Buzz*, to have a 'Green Page'. For this, we paid £150 for an article once a month for about six months.

We organised the public showing of three of the documentaries on two separate occasions. This was publicised by sending a letter to each local councillor, by advertising in the local press and by distributing leaflets and putting up posters wherever we could.

This attracted an audience of about forty, including some councillors and the Liberal Democrat Candidate for Parliament. We asked the audience to sign up if they were interested in organising a local group. Although perhaps only six or seven people signed, this, it turned out, was enough!

The outcomes? Firstly, and to our great relief (we are all somewhat 'past our prime'!), the baton has been handed on to a new organisation: The Bideford Sustainability Group. There is now a steering group and three focus groups, one of which is exploring the possibility of becoming a Transition Town. Two Friends from Bideford Meeting are members of the steering group but others have the main roles within it.

Secondly, as a result of the one-day workshop, we have managed to eliminate a 'cold spot' in the Meeting House and we are considering the feasibility of solar panels. Thirdly, we have a 'green slot' in our own Meeting Newsletter once a month.

Contributed by Jacqui Poole, Bideford Quaker Meeting



Sustainability story

The Wandsworth Green Fair

The Wandsworth Green Fair in 2009 arose out of a small 'green discussion group' at Wandsworth Quaker Meeting. We were considering ways of helping others in the Meeting to learn more about sustainability, and of doing something practical to involve the wider local community. We hit on the idea of a Green Fair which we would invite other local groups concerned with sustainability to organise with us, at the Meeting House, which is centrally located near the shopping centre.

The local business meeting was very supportive.

We fixed on a September date, and invited a range of local groups to a planning meeting about six months ahead. Some of these were already known to us, but a fair amount of research and networking was involved to get this far.

A couple of local Transition Town groups, Friends of the Earth, the local Green Party, the local Cycling Campaign, Food Up Front, etc., as well as a couple of local businesses (e.g. one that made organic juices), campaigns and charities were involved. The day itself offered opportunities to learn about energy efficiency, local wildlife, composting etc. as well as fun activities. A series of short films were shown and locally produced food and crafts were sold. The lunchtime talks and discussion on 'Climate change for the confused' and 'Building sustainable communities: what can we do together?' were the most successful.

A good time was had by all, with the Meeting House pretty full for much of the time, and a good sum of money raised. The planning process helped build stronger links with those involved, which have proved helpful in other local initiatives since then. Advance publicity in the local press brought a few people in but much more advance publicity and posters would have been helpful. Visitors asked about Quakers, and those running the event with us were able to see how some of our beliefs were put into practice – not just in our relation to stewardship of the earth but also in discussing why we didn't want raffles or wouldn't have a bar.

All in all, a lot of work but very rewarding. Our premises are probably not right to do such an ambitious event regularly, but the idea of inviting other local groups to run a joint event on our premises is certainly worth considering elsewhere.

Contributed by Linda Murgatroyd, Wandsworth Quaker Meeting



Meeting check-up

This check-up is designed to help you identify what you are already doing as a meeting to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. This will help you affirm your successes as well as prioritise what you would like to do next.

We recommend that you do this as a group, and that you share the findings of the check-up with the rest of the meeting. Skip the sections that aren't relevant to your meeting. There is space for notes after each section if you feel you have more to add. Some questions ask you to answer 'yes' or 'potential to develop'; feel free to choose both.

Photocopy this check-up and continue on additional sheets of paper if necessary. You could create a big chart for your wall, based on the questions below, and add to it as you do things over time.

Listening and learning

How many sustainability-themed sessions have you held in the last year – including talks, films, discussion or action groups, learning or worship sharing sessions? (Tick one)

☐ None ☐ 1–2 ☐ 3–4 ☐ 5

How many of these involved children and young people?

☐ None ☐ 1–2 ☐ 3–4 ☐ 5

Notes:

See pages 19–22 for some suggestions for listening and learning.

Supporting Friends

How are Friends supported to take action in their own lives to become low-carbon and sustainable?

Is there a way for Friends to share with others what they are doing to live more sustainably, e.g. a notice board or newsletter?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Notes:

See pages 14–17 for ideas for supporting Friends and sharing.

Climate impact

Have you calculated the climate impact of your meeting?

Use the Meeting Climate Impact Calculator to work out the climate impact of your building and the activities of your meeting. A sample hard copy is enclosed. Feel free to photocopy it, or request further copies using the contact details at the front of the toolkit. However, you may find it easier to fill it out online at www.quaker.org.uk/climate-impact-calculators.

Filling out the calculator does take some effort; you may well want to do it over time, and focus on one section at a time.

As a meeting you could commit to filling in the form (or part of it) again in a year's time. Then you'll be able to see the difference your activities have made, and we'll be able to chart development across Yearly Meeting.

See also the Climate Impact Calculator for individuals. A sample copy is enclosed. Again, feel free to photocopy it, or request further copies using the contact details at the front of the toolkit. However, you may find it easier to fill them out online at www.quaker.org.uk/climate-impact-calculators.

You could work together as a meeting to calculate your individual impacts and then add these to the results from the Meeting Climate Impact Calculator to get an even fuller picture of your impact.

QPSW is recording the climate impact of meetings in order to baseline the climate impact of Britain Yearly Meeting and track how this changes. Please send your results to Sunniva Taylor using the contact details at the front of the toolkit.

Who is taking action?

Are the sustainability initiatives in the meeting coming from one Friend (e.g. the warden), from a small group (premises and finance or other), or are they whole meeting decisions?

Notes:

Energy use

How have you tried to reduce the energy use of your building, e.g. being careful with heating use and lights?

Notes:

2. LISTENING & OBSERVING

What have you done to increase the efficiency of the building (e.g. draught-proofing and insulation, or installing a more efficient boiler)?

Notes:

Have you started generating your own green energy (e.g. by installing photovoltaic panels)?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Notes:

Have you made efforts to reduce the water usage of your building?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Notes:

Do you manage meeting house land in a way that is beneficial to wildlife and biodiversity?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Notes:

See pages 35–48 for ideas on what you can do to make your building and land more sustainable.

2. LISTENING & OBSERVING

Consumption and waste

As a meeting are you making efforts to consume in sustainable ways (e.g. by using environmentally friendly products)?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Does your meeting have recycling facilities?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Notes:

See pages 49–50 for ideas on how to reduce consumption and waste.

Transport

Have you made any changes to help Friends make environmentally friendly choices about how they travel to meeting (e.g. sharing cars, changing the meeting time to make it easier to use public transport, installing bike racks)?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Notes:

See page 51 for some suggestions of what to consider.

Use of money

As a meeting have you considered how your money is invested, particularly with regard to sustainability?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Notes:

See pages 52–54 for information on investing sustainably.

2. LISTENING & OBSERVING

Political action

As a meeting have you engaged in any political or advocacy action related to sustainability in the last year (e.g. invited your MP to speak, held a stall with information about climate change, or supported a Friend involved in climate change activism)?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Notes:

See pages 61–63 for ideas on how to engage in political action.

Community engagement

Is your meeting engaged with any local sustainability groups?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Do you advise building users of your environmental concerns and request that they use the building in environmentally friendly ways?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Have you considered how your building or land could be used as a community space for sustainability activity?

☐ Yes ☐ Potential to develop

Notes:

See Section 5 for ideas on sharing and engaging with others.

Having filled in this check-up it may be a good idea to spend some time as a group considering what you have found. Identify some actions that you now want to take. Use the following sections to help you work out what you might do. This process might need to take place over a few months, or you may identify something straight away.

You could write down your ideas for action here (please continue on additional paper if necessary):
